

DATAUNION Seminar Series
Databases and Artificial Intelligences: a scholarly and artistic perspective

6 June 2023 | Be Central, Brussels, Belgium

Seminar introduction and objective

We live in a world characterized by the multiplication of databases. The ambition to collect digital data, to make information systems interoperable and to deploy artificial intelligence seems everywhere. How can we – researchers, artists or professionals - make sense of these dynamics, and better understand how they affect our own practices, and the power relations we inhabit? This seminar aims to explore concepts and methods of research and visualization from academic and artistic perspectives. To foster the conversation, we invited Francis Hunger – an artist and researcher whose practice combines artistic research and media theory throughout his research into histories of technology as expressions of power constellations. Alongside the invited speaker, this seminar brings together artists and scholars from different backgrounds – Critical Security Studies, Media, Art, Photography, Architecture, Data Studies and Software Design.

In the spirit of the DATAUNION reading group and seminar series, attendants in this event are invited to actively participate in the exchanges. Time is foreseen in each session to facilitate the conversation beyond those presenting and discussing. Please register in advance by sending a message at DataUnion_ERC@vub.be.

The seminar is hosted by [FARI](#) Institute-*AI for the common good*, at Be Central, and it is co-organised by the DATAUNION project (funded by the European Research Council), the Privacy Salon and the COHUBICOL project (funded by the European Research Council). The seminar is organized by Rocco Bellanova and Megan Hadasa Leal Causton in the framework of the ERC Starting Grant DATAUNION, by Thierry Vandebussche of the Privacy Salon, and Gianmarco Gori in the framework of the ERC Advanced Grant COHUBICOL. The seminar is funded by the European Union (ERC, DATAUNION, project number 101043213). Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors (organisers, speakers or discussants) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

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Seminar Program

Date: 6 June 2023

Venue: Be Central, FARI institute, Cantersteen 16, 1000 Brussels.

10:00-10:30 | *Welcome & introduction*

- Rocco Bellanova, LSTS/Vrije Universiteit Brussel [BE]
- Tour-de-table. All participants are invited to share about their current research or artwork, and their theoretical struggles or puzzles.

10:30-12:00 | *From Harvesting Data to Unhying Artificial 'Intelligence'*

Francis Hunger will present his recent academic work and situate it in relation to those scholarly conversations that influenced it.¹ After an initial 30 min. presentation, all participants are invited to intervene and exchange, in the spirit of the DATAUNION reading group.

- Francis Hunger, Hartware MedienKunstVerein [DE] | speaker

Discussant: Gianmarco

Discussant: Alice?

12:00-13:00 | Lunch

13:00-14:00 | *Artistic approaches to the social practices of data production*

Francis Hunger will walk us through his artistic practice.

- Francis Hunger, Hartware MedienKunstVerein [DE]

Discussant: Megan Hadasa Leal Causton, LSTS/Vrije Universiteit Brussel [BE]

14:00-15:00 | *Roundtable*

- Sofie De Caigny, Flanders Architecture Institute [BE] (tbc)
- Francesco Ragazzi, Leiden University (PI of the ERC project *Security Vision*) [NL]
- Jan Kempnaers, [BE]

Moderator: Thierry Vandenbussche, Privacy Salon [BE]

17:00-17:10 | Closing remarks

- Rocco Bellanova, LSTS/Vrije Universiteit Brussel [BE]

19:00 | Speakers' dinner [by invitation]

Bios:

Rocco Bellanova is a Research Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (interdisciplinary research group Law, Science, Technology & Society-LSTS). He is the Principal Investigator of the ERC Starting Grant project "DATAUNION - The European Data Union: European Security Integration through Database Interoperability." He is also a member of the editorial board of the leading interdisciplinary scientific journal *Big Data & Society*. His work sits at the intersection of politics, law, and science and technology studies. He studies how digital data become pivotal elements in the governing of societies. His research focuses on European security practices and the role of data protection therein.

Sofie De Caigny has been director of the Flemish Architecture Institute since January 2018. Before that she was coordinator of the Center for Flemish Architectural Archives. Since 2011 she teaches the course

¹ Suggested readings: Grier, D. G. (2012). The Relational Database and the Concept of the Information System. *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, 34(4), 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.1109/mahc.2012.70>; Hunger, F. (2018). Epistemic Harvest. *A Peer-reviewed Journal About Research Values*, Universitat Aarhus, 7(1), 52–65. <https://doi.org/10.7146/apria.v7i1.115064>; Hunger, F. (2023). Unhype Artificial 'Intelligence'! A proposal to replace the deceiving terminology of AI. In *Zenodo* (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research). European Organization for Nuclear Research. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7524493>

Architectural Critique at the Department of Design Sciences of the University of Antwerp and since 2014 she is Secretary General of ICAM – International Confederation of Architectural Museums. <https://www.vai.be/>

Gianmarco Gori is a postdoctoral researcher at the Law, Science, Technology, Society Research Group (LSTS) at the VUB, working on the project [COHUBICOL](#) and [HumanE AI Net](#). His interests include the study of normativity and epistemology at the intersection of law and computational approaches. As a member of “L’altro diritto – Interuniversity Research Centre on prison, deviance, marginality and government of migrations”, Gianmarco has done research and strategic litigation in the field of labour exploitation, human trafficking, illegal discrimination, immigrants’ and prisoners’ rights. He is a member of the Bar Association of Florence, where he has been in practice in the fields of criminal, immigration, and data protection law.

Francis Hunger is an artist and researcher, investing into histories of technology as an expression of power constellations. His practice combines artistic research and media theory with the capabilities of narration through installations, radio plays and performances and internet-based art. Part of his research focused on computing media in Eastern Europe during the Cold War period. Currently he is a researcher for the project *Training The Archive* at Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund, critically examining the use of AI, statistics and pattern recognition for art and curating. In winter semester 2022/23 Francis was guest professor at the Intermedia program of the Hungarian Academy for Visual Arts, Budapest. In 2022 he co-curated with Inke Arns and Marie Lechner the exhibition *House of Mirrors – Artificial Intelligence as Phantasm* at HMKV, Dortmund. Francis Hunger finished his studies of media arts at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig with Prof. Helmut Marks, earning the Meisterschüler degree in 2007. He was junior curator at Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund 2005–2008. Subsequently he taught at the Academy of Art and Design, Burg Giebichenstein Halle/Saale 2008–2017. Since 2015–2022 he researched his Ph.D. about the Emergence of the Relational Database Model at Bauhaus University, Weimar. www.irmielin.org | <https://twitter.com/databaseculture>

Jan Kempenaers lives and works in Antwerp. He studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent and at the Jan Van Eyck Academy in Maastricht. He has been affiliated with the KASK School of Arts in Ghent since 2006. Since the mid-eighties, Kempenaers has been photographing urban & natural landscapes, architectures, as well as monuments. In 2012, he completed a PhD in the visual arts about the picturesque. His most recent book *Belgian Colonial Monuments* is published by Roma Publications. | <https://www.jankempenaers.info>

Megan Hadasa Leal Causton is a researcher at the Law, Science, Technology and Society research group at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. She is a PhD candidate on the ERC funded DATAUNION project. Prior to joining VUB, Megan worked as a Data Scientist and Researcher within the tech and GLAM sector including the Nationaal Archief (NL). She holds a MA from the University of Amsterdam in Archival and Information Studies and a BA from the Glasgow School of Art. Megan Hadasa’s research interests revolve around the fields of Archival & Information Studies, Media Studies, Technology Studies, and developing interdisciplinary digital methods for mapping complex information environments. Her latest research includes taking an Informatics approach to investigating the transfer of OSINT origin evidential records into the International Criminal Court from third party organisations.

Francesco Ragazzi is an Associate Professor in International Relations at Institute of Political Science, Leiden University (Netherlands), co-director of ReCNTR, Leiden University’s Center on Multimodal and Audiovisual Methods, and associated scholar at the Centre d’Etude sur les Conflits, Liberté et Sécurité (France). He holds a PhD from Northwestern University and Science Po Paris, as well as a masters in film from Netherlands Film Academy. His research interests include diaspora politics, counter-terrorism and algorithmic security politics. | <https://www.securityvision.io/>

Thierry Vandenbussche is currently Artistic Director at Privacytopia/Privacy Salon (VUB), Thierry Vandenbussche launched his curatorial career in 2001 bringing to life the festival *Courtisane*, a platform for film and audiovisual arts, exploring the relationships between image and world, aesthetic and politics, experiment, and engagement. In 2007 his attention shifted to photographic work on the edge of the medium, the fusion between the still image, its own history & technical background vs. other artistic media (like sculpture, performance, painting...). The 'Outlandish' organization was a curator/artist collective. A gallery space was opened in Antwerp - still gallery. *Borger*, *Borg Biennale* and *Observatorium* have been other local initiatives by Thierry Vandenbussche, presenting many Belgian and international artists from all artistic media. In 2019 he co-curated 'Festival of Control', an exhibition about the controlling nature of humans. Today his focus is on data use and its implications on individuals and society. Not only surveillance, privacy and data protection are dealt with, also AI, IoT, Machine Learning, robotics, cyborgs.

Alice Whelan (VUB/LSTS) is a PhD candidate on the ERC DATAUNION team. She holds a BA in PPES from Trinity College Dublin and an MSc in International Politics from Leiden University. Her research interests stem from engagement with critical security studies, international political sociology and STS. Currently her research questions focus on (data) subjectivity and knowledge practices, and the role of private actors therein.